

Solano County Health & Social Services Department



Mental Health Services
Public Health Services
Substance Abuse Services
Older & Disabled Adult Services

Eligibility Services
Employment Services
Children's Services
Administrative Services

Patrick O. Duterte, Director

275 Beck Avenue, MS 5-200
Fairfield, CA 94533-0677

(707) 784-8400
FAX (707) 421-3207

RECEIVED
DEC 3 8 2004

SOLANO COUNTY COUNTY'S
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

December 3, 2004

Cathy Houck
Foreperson
2004/05 Solano County Grand Jury
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533

Dear Ms. Houck:

Re: Amended Response of Solano County Department of Health and Social Services to Findings and Recommendations Pertaining the Child Protective Services

The Solano County Department of Health and Social Services received the Grand Jury's correspondence of October 26, 2004, indicating concern with the response provided by our department pertaining to the findings and recommendations of the 2003-2004 Grand Jury related to Child Protective Services.

We have taken the opportunity to review our response and the provisions of Penal Code section 933.05.

Please find enclosed an Amended Response which clarifies as set forth in Penal Code section 933.05 the department's response.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrick O. Duterte".

Patrick Duterte, Director
Solano County Health and Social Services

Enclosure

Cc: Honorable Peter B. Foor, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Solano County Board of Supervisors
Michael Johnson, Solano County Administrator

2003-2004 Grand Jury Report Amended Response to Finding No. 1 of the Solano County Department of Health and Social Services

Introduction

The Department of Health and Social Services wishes to recognize the valuable input provided by the Grand Jury in their evaluation of Child Protective Services. Virtually every member of the Department's leadership and Child Protective Services (CPS) staff believe this to be the most critical service the County provides. Further, we believe that the understanding and involvement of the community is crucial to our success in our mission to protect children.

We have reviewed carefully each of the findings and recommendations issued by the Grand Jury. In several areas, the findings have helped identify areas that need to be addressed. In other areas, improvement is underway and the Report provides sharper focus. In a few instances, clarification is necessary to improve the Grand Jury and public's understanding of the operations of CPS.

***Finding 1:** The Grand Jury uncovered a series of systemic roadblocks that prevent optimal operation of the CPS program, thereby endangering children in Solano County. Although there have been internal and external attempts to correct these deficiencies, CPS has continued to demonstrate an inability to self-correct. The organizational culture is subverting the achievement of the CPS mission.*

Response: The Department of Health and Social Services agrees in part and disagrees in part with the finding.

The Grand Jury correctly notes that there have been both internal and external improvements to correct efficiencies. These include implementing improved training programs and more effective protocols among agencies that are involved in protecting children. Specific issues will be addressed in this report on an issue-by-issue basis, as raised by the Grand Jury.

The Department of Health and Social Services disagrees that systemic problems exist in the Child Welfare Division that are unique to the Solano County Department of Health and Social Services and that alleged systemic problems have endangered children. The Department of Health and Social Services additionally disagrees that an organizational culture exists that is subverting the achievement of the CPS mission. While the Child Welfare division may have some problems, the problems are not atypical of this type of program and ongoing efforts continue to exist to identify and resolve problems as they arise. CPS staff continue to provide excellent child welfare services, meeting mandated deadlines as well as existing and increasing legal requirements, within limited County resources.

Note: In making this finding, the Grand Jury referenced the tragic death of a four-year-old as an example of the possible outcome of systemic failure in these areas. Subsequent interviews with the Grand Jury assure us that there was no complaint or specific issue to connect this case with the Department's policies. The child death referenced came after an anonymous report of abuse that provided an invalid address that could not be traced, despite the Social Worker's efforts to locate the family.

Recommendation #1: *The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the formation of a Blue Ribbon Committee independent of HSS (modeled after the 2003 San Mateo County Blue Ribbon Committee) consisting of former judges, non-Solano County social workers, academics, concerned citizens and union officials to review the entire CPS program and recommend changes.*

Response: The recommendation, as stated, will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The Department of Health and Social Services recognizes the ongoing value of independent review and recommendations for ongoing improvement to the CPS program. However, the Department of Health and Social Services does not agree that a Blue Ribbon Committee as suggested by the Grand Jury is the only or best manner for obtaining this input. Instead, the Department of Health and Social Services believes it is important that the model we apply is one that best suits the needs and issues of Solano County's program, rather than those of another county where the issues are very different.

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) conducted a thorough audit of Solano County's Child Protective Services in 1999, leading to 72 recommendations that were implemented or partially implemented. The guidance provided by CWLA was critical in helping make major improvements throughout the program, many of which were identified by a previous Grand Jury. In responding to the findings of the CWLA audit, the Department recognized that it was confronting a long-term guide for change, and that there was great potential for a revisit and progress review a few years later.

Since CWLA offers the advantages of in-depth experience in Solano County's CPS issues and foremost expertise in the field, we believe it to be an excellent choice to conduct this review in the shortest timeline, including evaluation of concerns as identified by the Grand Jury. As of this writing, negotiations are underway with CWLA to conduct this review.

Finding #2: Social workers are not receiving the practical training needed for them to conduct proper investigations and interviews in order to make appropriate decisions for the children of Solano County.

Response: Agree in part with the finding. Disagree in part, or clarification required (see below).

Recommendation #2: Employees should be given performance-based training for them to conduct proper investigations and interviews in order to make appropriate decisions for the children of Solano County.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

New caseworkers hired by CPS must meet strong training requirements and hiring criteria necessary for this very difficult work. Most new caseworkers come to the job with a master's degree in social work and often, with field experience gained in pursuit of that master's degree. Caseworkers are given an initial orientation to the work as a Child Welfare Worker. The Staff Development Supervisor develops a training plan for each new worker after conducting an individual assessment of the worker's experience. The plan consists of in-house training, other training opportunities as appropriate, and attendance at core training offered by the Regional Training Academies. In addition, workers receive supervision and training by their supervisors within their assigned units. One challenge in CPS is to provide training to workers so that they may be put to work as quickly as possible addressing the ever-growing caseload of children needing protection.

We agree that the enhanced training program implemented by the department in response to the original CWLA audit is good but not sufficient. We agree that the Department must commit to a full and adequate orientation program while balancing our critical need to get caseworkers in the field, visiting families, as quickly as possible. The Department has identified this as a first priority to begin improving staff's ability to do the job at the field level. We will have our outside consultant (CWLA) address this issue as one of its top areas to review and make recommendations.